

Tribhuvan University

Backdrops of Economy: Loss of Home and Identity of Women in Patricia
McCormick's *Sold*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English

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June 2023

Letter of Recommendation

This research entitled “Backdrops of Economy: Loss of Home and Identity of Women in Patricia McCormick’s *Sold*” has been successfully completed under my supervision by Sudeep Chuwai in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English. I would like to recommend this research be examined by an external examiner.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Backdrops of Economy: Loss of Home and Identity of Women in Patricia McCormick’s *Sold*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, by Sudeep Chuwai has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor Dr. Shiva Rijal, Lecturer of English at the Central Department of English, for making this work possible. His intellectual guidance, critical comments, and genuine suggestions carried me through the entire stages of writing the paper.

I would also like to give my warmest thanks to Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, the Head of the Central Department of English, for approving this thesis paper in its present form. I am grateful to him for his valuable suggestions and guidance.

I would like to convey my special thanks to my teachers and friends who motivated and supported me in preparing this thesis.

Finally, I would wholeheartedly thank my parents for letting me through all the difficulties. I experienced their guidance, continuous support, and understanding when undertaking research and writing my project. It is your prayer that sustained me this far.

June 2023

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McCormick's *Sold*

Abstract

*This paper examines the loss of home and identity of women in backdrops of the economy in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*. The novel revolves around the story of the protagonist, Laxmi, who is sold in the brothel by her stepfather for the sake of money. She confronts several challenges like unwilling sexual relationships and punishment from Mumtaz, the woman who runs the brothel, to name but a few; however, ultimately, she rescues herself from such diabolical experiences with the help of an unnamed American character. In this relevance, this research paper embodies the Marxist feminist perspective, most specifically, Alexendra Kollentai's notion of proletariat women, and Silvia Federici's concept of primitive accumulation, and slightly takes Simon de Beauvoir's insight of independent women to seek out the issues that rises in the text. The paper claims that there is a strong relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. Until and unless women take external agencies, like the protagonist accepting an anonymous American to be her agency, they are incapable of overthrowing the dirt of restriction and domination indoctrinated by patriarchy. The paper comes up with the conclusion that, in women's domination, there is the role of women themselves, which might be less proportionately, but that helps men to suppress women. Moreover, the stronger the bond between patriarchy and capitalism, the more the layers of suffering, loss of home, and freedom, for instance, women go through.*

Keywords: capitalism, domination, trafficking, commodity, and women.

Patricia McCormick's *Sold* depicts the loss of home, identity, and freedom of women in a capitalistic male-dominated society. The social structure, motivated by

the fragmented wills of individuals, victimizes women, converting them merely as a commodity rather than considering them as independent human beings. The novel is a vehement articulation of suspended women's positions which are understood as a mechanism through which capitalists reverse the thrust of their inner desire. Indeed, women are the prolific players of society, who, no doubt, maintain the balance of need and fulfillment sacrificing themselves; however, they are evaluated merely in terms of their exchange value. In this relevance, the novel is a projection of women's suffering, constantly intimidated by the capitalistic behaviors that overthrow them from the segmented territory of society, including family and self.

Patricia McCormick's *Sold* tells the story of Lakshmi, the protagonist of the novel, a thirteen-year-old girl, from a poor village in Nepal. Her family struggles to make ends meet, so when a glamorous stranger offers to take Lakshmi to the city to work as a maid, she eagerly agrees. But upon arriving in the city, Lakshmi quickly learns that she has been sold into prostitution. She is forced to work in a brothel, where she is brutally beaten and abused by the customers and the brothel's owner. She befriends the other girls in the brothel and learns to survive in this world of violence and exploitation.

Despite the harsh realities of her situation, Lakshmi never gives up hope of escaping and returning home to her family. With the help of a kind American woman who works at the local charity, Lakshmi is eventually rescued and brought to a safe house, where she begins the long process of healing and rebuilding her life. Throughout the novel, McCormick sensitively portrays the horrors of sex trafficking and the resilience of its victims. *Sold* is a powerful and important story that sheds light on a disturbing global problem while also celebrating the strength and courage of those who fight against it.

The moving story of the protagonist, Laxmi, dramatizes a multifaceted spectrum of suffering, where lies the dark and gothic reality of a girl. Holly Johnson argues, “Told over approximately one year and in short vignettes, *Sold* is an upper-middle/secondary-grade novel that allows readers to experience how child labor across the world includes work that is sexually abusive and heart-wrenching” (22). Johnson considers *Sold* to be a representative novel that articulates the terrific situation of children across the globe who are suffering from sexual abuse. Indeed, the novel is a microcosm of global reality that encompasses the diabolical faces of traffickers who, in the name of love and care, swindle girls into an unconditional state of life from which they can never return. Johnson is right in the sense that the novel is the story of a sexually abused girl but it is necessary to understand that the novel is also a question that points to the root of the causes of sexual abuse. In this sense, the novel does not merely portray a heart-wrenching story but also answers the question of why and how they are abused.

There are always motives of a doer in performing certain acts. The traffickers, in the novel, are involved in such a situation through which they can hide their reality and delude the audience. More importantly, the performers are more concerned with their relative objects because that determines their location. The point is that the novel encapsulates characters who are involved in the girl trafficking process and constantly transform the identity of the girl to ease their works. Faisal Lafee Alobeytha et al. argue, “. . . the traffickers always try to destroy the identity of the trafficked child for sex purpose and replace it with the new identity (prostitute’s identity), the novelist addresses those trafficked girls that they should never give up and they should fight to protect their real identity” (8). Faisal et al. illuminate that when children are trafficked for sex, the traffickers often try to make them forget who they are and force them to

become prostitutes. The author of the novel is talking to these girls who have been trafficked and is telling them not to give up. Moreover, she wants them to remember who they are and not let the traffickers take away their true identity, encouraging the girls to fight back and protect themselves.

Although the protagonist of the novel, at last, succeeds in freeing herself from the grip of Mumtaz, the lady who runs the brothel and to whom Laxmi is sold, with the help of an unnamed American character. However, it is not conspicuous because the story does not explain Laxmi's total liberation, and the subtitle of the novel "Can She Ever be Free?" puts us in a big question, whether she is discharged, Manika Subi Lakshmanan argues, "It is unfortunate that considering the courageous work done by several Nepali and Indian women, *Sold* portrays the "third world" woman as one whose liberation and identity cannot emerge from within her own society and culture" (87). From Lakshmanan's perspective, it is sad that the book *Sold* shows women from Nepal and India as if they cannot become strong and free on their own. She points out that the book seems to say that these women can only be helped by people from other countries. True it may be in the novel's premises because the unnamed American character works as an agency to liberate the protagonist; however, I argue the American is a symbolic representation of the economy. Why did the novelist choose a character from America? I think America is generally believed as a successful country in terms of economy. In this relevance, the outsider is a symbolic articulation of the economy that ultimately redeems Laxmi.

The layers of oppression and subordination, the domination of Laxmi's stepfather, and Laxmi's innocence to name but a few, are the central essence of the novel. These marginalizations are based on certain reasons. Merry Julia Pardede and Neisya find four major causes of these problems as they list, "(1) patriarchy (2) the

rural poverty (3) capitalism (4) age” (92). They have also identified eight ways that the main character resists this oppression, including obeying, enduring suffering, feeling worthless and disgusted with herself, seeking freedom, pretending for comfort, hoping for laws against human trafficking, learning new things, and longing for affection (92-93). In this relevance, they discover that “women’s oppression in the novel is complex continual events. There is a mutual interaction between patriarchy and capitalism” (93). Indeed Pardede and Neisya are right in the sense that the economy has an indispensable relationship with patriarchy; however, they did not discuss why there is such a relationship where women are the victims. Moreover, they failed to address the question of what culminated in the interplay of economy and patriarchy.

The economic condition and the fundamental basis of the social and familial structure are the perpetual force that not only undermines the position of the women but also continuously subverts them from their rightful position. In this relevance, this research paper focuses on three specific questions: How is the economy a consistent force that is responsible for the deterioration of the homely environment of women? Why has the novelist illustrated the changing identity of the protagonist in the capitalist circle? And how freedom of women is associated with the economic domain of society? To answer these questions, this research paper considers Marxist feminist thinkers because they explore how women are marginalized within capitalist systems and argue that patriarchy and capitalism are interconnected and reinforce each other. Kollontai, for example, explains at great length the class nature of the bourgeois women's movement and its limitation in taking up issues of working-class women. She believed that women's oppression was rooted in the economic and social structures of capitalist society. To put it in her words, “Women can only become truly

free and equal in a world that has been transformed and based on new social and economic principles” (10). Kollontai exposes that women’s emancipation is possible merely if women are equated with men in terms of economy. Furthermore, she claims, “. . . each new gain by the working class is a rung in the ladder leading mankind to the kingdom of freedom and social equality; each new right won by women brings them closer to their goal - total emancipation” (10). Each victory for the working class or women brings humanity closer to freedom and social equality. In relation to this conception, this research also considers Silvia Federici’s notion of women’s possibility of registering their sustainability as she claims, “For the power of women and their relations with men were, at all times, determined by the struggles which their communities fought against the landlords, and the changes that these struggles produced in the master-servant relation” (27). Federici’s argument clarifies that there is a hierarchical relationship between man and woman that is shaped by a historical economic structure that should be necessarily broken to emanate women’s liberty.

The novel illustrates the dichotomized familial structure where Laxmi, though innocently, has to confront challenges without considering her vulnerability. Lakshmi, as a daughter, is subjected to oppression by her stepfather who uses his position as the head of the family to exploit her mother's obedience to maintain the family's survival, even though he is unemployed and spends most of his time indulging in his own pleasures. This is evident from the conversation Lakshmi's mother has with her: “Your stepfather has said you must go to the city and earn your keep as a maid. This news is like a tiny earthquake, shaking the very ground beneath my feet. And yet, for Ama, I stand firm” (51). Lakshmi is in a position of powerlessness as she disagrees with her stepfather's mistreatment of herself and her mother, but is unable to voice her thoughts due to his dominant control over the family. She witnesses her stepfather's

neglect of the family's needs and daily struggles. Furthermore, Lakshmi's mother's way of raising her reinforces patriarchal attitudes, making Lakshmi feel inferior and incapable of fighting for her rights within the family.

Lakshmi's mother must express her feelings, desires, and choices for the well-being of the family and her daughter. As a child, Lakshmi has the right to receive her mother's support and protection, and it is the mother's responsibility to exercise her leadership and take care of her daughter. Additionally, as the first woman in the family, she must use her authority to manage the household effectively. However, instead of maintaining a firm position in her family, she is a dependent being, dominated by her husband. In fact, she is so explicitly rooted with her husband that as the novel exposes when her husband disappears in search of money for so long and comes back she says, "Even a man who gambles away what little we have on a fancy hat and a new coat . . . is better than no man at all" (44). These lines clarify that Laxmi's mother understands the necessity of male characters in her life and family. She really thinks that whatever the male character is, it is always an advantage to have a man rather than having none. The psychological dimension of Laxmi's mother illuminates that she is captivated by the notion indoctrinated by the male. In other words, she has accepted the fact that females are vulnerable and they need men to support their life. However, Kollantai believes:

While women are compelled to sell their labour force and bear the yoke of capitalism, while the present exploitative system of producing new values continues to exist, they cannot become free and independent persons, wives who choose their husbands exclusively on the dictates of the heart, and mothers who can look without fear to the future of their children. (26)

Kollantai argues that women should go beyond the comfort zone created by the male. They need to understand the internal dynamics of the social structure so that they can elevate their position. Nevertheless, the actions encompassed by Laxmi's father show that women are circumscribed by the necessity of males. Their life is incapable of sustaining their existence without a male. From Laxmi's mother's perspective, the male perhaps is worthless and has nothing to do with the prosperity and productivity of the family; she thinks there is an unconditional necessity for a male in the family. These stereotypical notions are injected into the mind of Laxmi's mother which is why she is undoubtedly indispensable to Laxmi's stepfather.

In this sense, the root of patriarchy is also connected with their own consent. To be more specific, the validation of the patriarchy is certified by the consent of the female themselves. The way Laxmi's mother responds to her husband's comeback is strong evidence that the informal institution of patriarchy is robust and always in action because deep down there is an unquestionable relationship between the power of patriarchy and the consensus between women and their will. This becomes more palpable when Ama, Laxmi's mother, suggests Laxmi be a good woman. Ama's advice can be illustrated in the following ways:

Never look a man in the eye. Never allow yourself to be alone with a man who is not family. And never look at growing pumpkins or cucumbers when you are bleeding. Otherwise, they will rot. Once you are married . . . you must eat your meal only after your husband has had his fill. Then you may have what remains. If he burps at the end of the meal, it is a sign that you have pleased him. If he turns to you at night, you must give yourself to him, in the hopes that you will bear him a son. (21)

These pieces of advice are workable documents that show how the female generation counsel the younger one. In other words, how young females are cultivated by their mothers to sustain their life in a patriarchal society. Laxmi is suggested by her mother to be a good woman and a benevolent wife to accommodate herself in the regime of patriarchy. In this relevance, it is important to comprehend that the inner spirit of patriarchy is consolidated by the approval of the women themselves. In this connection, Raymond S. Pfeiffer's proposition is worth quoting as she claims, "Male attitudes and behavior in contemporary society promote oppression in conjunction with compliant feminine attitudes and behavior. The oppression of women comprises a broad complex of socio-economic factors, of which the male role may be the largest but seems not to be the only" (224). Pfeiffer suggests that though males are the dominant factor that causes the oppression of women they are not the only factor that is responsible for this particular factor. In fact, some other conditions like female themselves and the power of the economy does function as a working mechanism that institutionalizes this harsh reality that materializes the value that subordinates women.

However, it will be a misinterpretation if Laxmi's mother's action is considered to be her autonomous will as she willingly accepted the domination of the male as a general entity that she deliberately acted upon. The structural root, in fact, is the major factor that determines the action and the reaction of an individual. As Martha E. Gimenez argues, "The social formations where capitalism is the dominant mode of production, the functioning of the mode of production determine the social organization (establishes historical limits for its variability) and the economic foundations of human reproduction or mode of reproduction" (19). Gimenez argues that in the social world where the economy becomes the foundation the entire organizations are formulated by the authority of the economy. In other words, the

economy dictates the composition of societal structure and it shapes the production and reproduction of societal norms and values. These very principles are unconditionally articulated in the novel, depicting the poor economic condition of Laxmi's family and the domination they accept owing to their economic condition.

Perhaps it is a natural cause that paves the way for the suffering of Laxmi's family. The natural delay or the absence of rain causes a fall in their harvesting. With deserted land with their deserted hopes, they pray to gods that could offer rain; however, as Laxmi says, "I watch as Ama makes an offering of marigold petals, red kumkum powder, and, a few precious bits of rice to her goddess, praying for rain. But the only water that falls comes Ama's eye" (29). Laxmi's mother does everything she could but the result remains always intact with calm and action-lessness. In this regard, her stepfather says, "If the rains don't come soon . . . you will have to share your earrings" (29). Laxmi's mother is not the cause of dryness; however, she has to deal with the consequence or has to be responsible for the situation. Indeed, explicating the endless horrific reality of poverty, Laxmi contemplates. "Yesterday, or the day before, or the day before that, Ama would have said, "Never." She would have said, Those are for Lakshmi. They are her dowry. But today she hangs her head like the paddy plants and says "Maybe tomorrow" (29). Laxmi's mother unquestioningly accepts the order of her husband. In this situation, it is understood that Laxmi's mother is accepting the order not because she has become the slave of patriarchy but because they have become so vulnerable that the economy could easily submerge them into the bottom of their life, if not that could kill them. Alexandra Kollontai writes, "Radical the demands of the feminists may appear, it must not be forgotten that, by virtue of their class position, the feminists cannot struggle to achieve a fundamental restructuring of the present economic-social structure of

society, and that without this the emancipation of women cannot be complete.” (25). The radical demands of feminists must be considered within the context of their class position, as they are not able to fight for a complete restructuring of the current economic and social structure of society. Without such a restructuring, women's emancipation cannot be fully achieved. This indicates that Laxmi's mother is not a radical feminist as she unhesitatingly accepts her husband's decision about their daughter. In a deeper sense, perhaps she is hegemonized. Indeed, Laxmi's stepfather subverts the power and position incorporated by Laxmi and her mother, however, more than his dominance, the economy was the compelling factor that obliged them to accept the demand aspired by the logic of the economy.

Laxmi's mother remains calm and accepts the words guaranteed by her husband. Instead of resisting her husband's idea to sell her daughter, Laxmi's mother says, “Your stepfather said you must go to the city and earn your keep as a maid” (58). Indeed Laxmi's mother did suffer because of the heart-wrenching deal; however, she undertakes the action and promises to farewell her daughter. The scenario precisely resonates with what Judith Andre says, “A wife, for instance, may consciously believe she should obey her husband; her belief, on the other hand, may be unconscious, and manifest itself only in her uneasiness when she obeys him” (110). This event shows how a woman is obliged to depart from the homely periphery. The more she adjusts to the situation she confronts, the more she loses her grip on her house. When Laxmi's mother tells Laxmi that she is expected to work as a maid in a city house, she daringly says, “This is good news, Ama. There will be one less mouth to feed here, and I will send my wages home” (54-55). Moreover, she says, “If I go, you will have money enough for rice and curds, milk and sugar. Enough for a coat for the baby and a sweater for you” (55). Laxmi, despite confronting the earthquake in her

heart owing to her far going, tries to assimilate or compromise with the situation. She thinks working in the city is an alternative to overthrowing the poverty of her family. However, Alexandra Kollontai writes, "Capital requires certain norms and guarantees if it is to grow and flourish; these norms can be ensured only with the participation of bourgeois representatives in the government of the country" (23-24). For capital to prosper and expand, specific standards and assurances are necessary, and these can only be maintained with the involvement of bourgeois representatives in the governance of the nation. Perhaps, she knows that they are confronting the challenges because of their vulnerable economic condition and the only way to get rid of the problem is through economic security.

Laxmi's decision was motivated by the circumstances they were inscribed to and this decision opens a terrific way in which she has to walk on. The way full of filthy thrones and hatred fences challenges the way that compels her to submerge in the veil of loss of home. Lakshmi, being a poor rural girl, is in a vulnerable position of being oppressed and marginalized, as poor people are often avoided and neglected. Her hometown is located far away from big cities, and she lives in a mountainous region where the rural poor are often left behind and forgotten in economically distressed small towns and isolated rural areas.

Due to the prevailing gender stereotypes, rural women have limited access to education and employment opportunities and are often regarded as inferior to men in all aspects of life. Lakshmi and her mother are responsible for providing the necessities of life and acting as breadwinners, while her stepfather, who should be the one providing for the family, only creates a violent atmosphere. Lakshmi and her mother are also expected to carry out physically demanding tasks that are typically seen as "men's work". As the novel depicts, "Ama and I must each make twenty trips

down the mountain to the village spring, waiting for our turn for water to bring up to the rice paddy. Tonight Ama and I scrub the cooking vessels clean with a mixture of earth and ash” (28-29). These experiences are the most familiar to Laxmi but as soon she is traded with a city woman, the experiences change and a new condition appears to her.

Laxmi’s life takes a turn for the worst after being sold to a pimp. She and her family have a deep connection with the rustic setting; however, she has to erase those strong memories while being distanced from her land and closer to the cities. In fact, while distancing herself from her home with the pimp, she inwardly says, “I am too shy to tell her I won’t run off, too timid to tell her how proud and nervous and excited I am to be the first person in my family to leave the mountain” (63). The place which was her origin, which was her life, and which was her soul, she was leaving it. She expresses her loss of home in the following ways:

I try to remember each hut, each village. I try to memorize each twist in the path so I can find my way home at a festival time next year. But when I close my eyes, each hut, each village, each twist in the road looks the same. And when I open my eyes and look behind us, the poinsettias stir in the wind, as if it touched by fire. It is a new world. But there is one constant: the mighty swallow-tailed peak. It grows smaller the farther we walk, but still, it is always there, waiting to guide me back. (64-65)

Laxmi describes every new surrounding in vivid detail. Her subtle description of the places is powerful enough to show how deeply she is rooted in the rustic things.

Meanwhile, her descriptions also expose that she is conscious about the years to come. She imagines, dreams, and plans for her coming back. Moreover, the distance that she informs us of is the distant possibility of her return. In other words, the

process of being the object smaller, which was closer and bigger before, is, actually, the blurring and detaching experience of her home. Although her physical body was being apart, she says, “Inside my head, I carry: my baby goat, my baby brother, my ama’s face, our family’s future” (66). She was being capable of denying the bodily relationship with her family and home; however, the memories she was inoculated with were immensely imprinted in her mind that she is incapable to erase it. In fact, she does not want to erase it.

The tragic departure of Laxmi is reinforced by the economic situation. Had her family been economically benefited, she should not have had to admit herself to a city woman. Nor should she have had to disbalance the inner and outer state of her life and relationships. Indeed, Laxmi agrees to work as a maid; nevertheless, it was not her will, nor was it her choice. However, the circumstances enforces her to accept the way, leaving her entire aspiration and necessities. In the words of Kathleen Barry:

When a young woman is made the object of a procuring strategy, she is likely to be a runaway from a home where she was abused, from a marriage where she was battered, or from rural poverty now seeking a better life on her own. Her needs are usually both emotional and economic. Rarely when a woman is approached by a procurer does she have any understanding of what is ahead of her: that she will likely be entering a situation from which she cannot leave voluntarily. (46)

Laxmi was confronting a similar situation as Kathleen Barry is explaining. Barry says when women confront a situation where they are treated as a commodity rather than a subject itself, they release themselves from such grip to find their redemption. Laxmi is obliged to choose to be a maid because she thinks that her wages work as an aid to her vulnerable family. She is ready to sacrifice her desire for the betterment of her

family. Despite disagreeing with her stepfather's decisions, Lakshmi is unable to speak up due to her lack of authority as a child. Living in a financially poor household, she also experiences domestic oppression but in doing so, as Barry claims, she pushes herself into the ditch from where she can never come out. In fact, in the process of resolving her family's problem, she happens to overthrow herself into losing her freedom.

The dominant status of the stepfather, the vulnerable economic condition, and the natural disaster that sway their plowing land were directly hammering Laxmi's family which was exacerbating their economic as well as psychological status. Since her family was going through harsh conditions, which was sufficient enough to take a risky action that could spoil her future, her decision was the reasoning factor that could, at least, feast them for two days. Therefore, "When home becomes a place of danger" Lorna Fox argues, "the positive associations of home: as a place of safety, of security, of control over oneself and one's environment; become subverted, and the effect can be psychologically very damaging" (594). Perhaps, the psychological pressure was more powerful to plunge her into such darkness than the physical demand of her body so she deliberately chose to be a maid.

On the one hand, Laxmi was inflicted by the diabolical economic condition of her family and thus she had to leave her home; on the other hand, she undeniably lived with the memories of her home and family. As Lorna Fox argues, "The ambivalence in the relationship between women and their homes has been described as 'a mixture of affection, reciprocated towards the home as a nurturing environment, and resentment towards the demands of the home'" (595). Laxmi has to leave her home because of the demand that was roaming around her life and she has to live in flashes of memories in the dark street because of her lost past. Whatsoever the case is,

if there is hope for betterment, there is always a bitter pill to swallow to encourage and energize the body. In the words of Laura Kipnis, “If the biological is always transformed into a set of social arrangements, then somewhere in the course of that transformation process, presumably some intervention or shift could take place, and the usual arrangements could be revamped into ones more advantageous to women” (434). In this sense, if Laxmi’s body could be the way to the redemption of her family, she was ready to materialize it. Perhaps, she might think in a similar light and decide to leave her home.

If the societal spaces for women are too congested, they are flexible enough to elasticize their domain to free themselves from restriction. As Abigail J. Stewart and David G. Winter write, “Since women became suppressed because of changes in the economic structure, Engels argued that improvements in their status would require removing women from their historic role in domestic labor and employing them in the modern, large-scale, socialized public industry” (532). Women are limited within the limitation of the patriarchal domain and their liberation is possible merely if they are given appropriate space. But what if they are even not given a chance to excel in the family sphere? Indeed they have to pave their way themselves. Laxmi, in the novel, chooses her destiny and dares to challenge the consequences though she is unaware of the fact that she is sold. She is forced to leave her home in Nepal and is sold into prostitution in India. The loss of Lakshmi's home and community is an ostensible portrayal of the devastating experience that shows the trauma that woman faces as a victim of human trafficking. She has a loving family and a close-knit community that she feels a strong connection to in the beginning. However, when her stepfather sells her to a brothel in India, she is ripped away from everything she knows and loves, including her home and her community.

As Lakshmi adjusts to her new life in the brothel, she longs for her home and the sense of belonging that she felt there. She tries to hold on to her memories of her family and her village, but the distance between her and her former life only grows with time. Her experience now has become memories as he says, “And each night, I dream that Ama and I are sitting outside our hut, looking down the mountain at the festival lights, and she is twining my hair into long dark braids” (115). She is forced to adapt to a new culture and language and to live in a foreign land where she feels isolated and alone. The dreadful people in the heartless city were scornful to threaten her inner stability as she contemplates, “I am afraid of this city where the lying-down people look like the dead. And the standing-up ones, like walking dead” (94).

Moreover, her friendship with David Beckham, who teaches her the language of society and how to tell her name suggests the loss of firmness that she used to have at her home and in her village. The newness she confronts, the appearance of the city she visualizes, and the dark thoughts that come to her mind is the representation of her loss of home. For example, “Now that the dry, hot months are here, there are nights when the entire city goes black. The electric lights go off, the music machine falls silent, the palm frond machine stops spinning and, for a moment, the whole city is still. It feels like the end of the world” (214). These lines show a strange scenario that she happens to encounter in the big city where she is working as a prostitute.

Moreover, Lakshmi's loss of her home and community is a significant part of her trauma, and her longing to return home is a driving force behind her attempts to escape from the brothel. The experience she goes through is deeply entrenched in her mind that she cannot resist the cause that brought her to this dark city which was full of filthy and noxious creatures. Her endless thoughts and reminiscences time and

again push her into hallucination. One out of many, for example, where she visualizes the days back is narrated in the following way:

My stepfather appears, wearing his big-shoulders coat and city hat, puffing on a cigarette. Then Baiji Sita is standing at the foot of the bed, locked in gossip with the headman's wife. And sometimes, Auntie Bimla comes, her eyes glinting like new coins. They seem real, but I know that they are not . . . I cannot tell which of the things they do mean really, and which are nightmares.

(129)

These lines illuminate how her loss of home was significantly striking in her mind. Indeed, life in the brothel was no less than a nightmare; however, it was more pathetic to stay in the memories of the past and the loss of her own. Lakshmi grew up in an environment, which ultimately led to her being sold as a trafficked child. She came to realize that her own sense of self and basic needs were not a priority for her stepfather, who not only mistreated her but also failed to provide her with the physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness, love needs, and esteem needs that are essential for self-actualization

Lakshmi's stepfather's repulsiveness was made apparent when he viewed her as a mere commodity and degraded her by comparing her to a cucumber. Lakshmi even wanted to confide in her mother and tell her, "My stepfather looks at me the same way he looks at the cucumbers I'm growing in front of our hut" (2). By addressing her with the words, "You had better get a good price for them" (2), he treated Lakshmi as an object rather than a human being, which caused her to develop low self-esteem. His cruel gaze created doubts in Lakshmi's mind about whether she was a commodity or a plant, further exacerbating her already fragile sense of identity.

The stepfather's brutality also extended to denying Lakshmi the opportunity to continue her education. Despite her mother's objections, he forbade Lakshmi from attending school, stating that education was a burden and reserved for sons only. Lakshmi's stepfather's repulsiveness was made apparent when he viewed her as a mere commodity and degraded her by comparing her to a cucumber. At the beginning of the novel, Lakshmi is a happy and curious girl who enjoys her life in her small village in Nepal. Her identity was concerned merely as a little child but as soon as she confronts the menstruation cycle, she becomes a woman. Her mother suggests: "You must stay out of sight for seven days . . . even the sun cannot see you until you've purified If you must use the privy, cover your face and head with your shawl" (20). These suggestions are associated with the social norms and values which is constructed to limit the boundaries of women. As Simone de Beauvoir claims, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman . . . it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and eunuch, that is called feminine" (293). The socio-cultural aspects are the situational constraints that undermine the essence of women and try to demean their existential domain. This is more intense when it comes to the plank of the male arena.

The dialogues uttered by Laxmi's mother are a vehement articulation of these realities. Indeed, she is more conscious to teach her a good lesson just to sustain her position in the male dominant society. Her suggestion for instance, "If your husband asks you to wash his feet, you must do as he says, then put a bit of the water in your mouth . . . This has always been our fate . . . Simply to endure . . . is to triumph" (22), reveals that women are always under the dominance of the male and they are to follow the guidelines prescribed by them rather than fighting against their values. It is

because accepting the rules is to win the race, at least in terms of winning a women's own life.

In these backdrops, it is palpable that when women follow the men's footsteps, they successfully protect themselves, though they have to undergo certain changes. And more importantly, it is also clear that women are supposed to change themselves to safeguard their vulnerable position. This fate is embedded with Laxmi's fate which urges her to lose her identity, not for once but multiple times. Identity, in this modern world is fleeting and unstable; however, it is as Lauren Leve claims, "a powerful organizing presence in social life today—a social fact, or so it would, at least, seem" (513). This is not the case with Laxmi; her identity changes when her stepfather sells her to Auntie Bimla. She becomes a named servant, a maid, though she was sold to a brothel actually she was taken telling her to be a working servant in the big city. When she reaches the city, crossing several villages, jungles, hills, and rivers, her identity changes again after meeting a strange man whom she calls 'uncle husband.' She calls the man uncle but he says, "I will be your uncle. But you must call me a husband. Do you understand?" (82). The conversation reveals that Laxmi was not merely admitting the man as her husband but also unconsciously accepting herself to be the wife, though temporarily or to keep it more precise, she was undertaking the relationship to pass the broader, if not permanently. This changing status of her identity was metamorphosing her standing ground, which was once stable and comprehensible.

The time Laxmi passes and the modes of life she experiences are dynamic and have multitudinous dimensions, at least in terms of the narration of her life. However, does it mean she should have a fragile identity analogous to her life experience which is vulnerable and slippery? Indeed, individual identity is a significant aspect of the

human essence that illustrates the grammar of presence. In the words of Anne K. Armstrong et al., “Identity is fundamentally a way of defining, describing, and locating oneself” (44). However, Laxmi’s condition is far from what she has to be situated in. Her position is so miserable that she even cannot understand when she has to adopt her new identity. Sometimes she is not even aware of who she is. When she is sold, she is forced to adopt a new identity as a prostitute. She is given a new name, Padma, and forced to wear makeup and dresses that she is not comfortable in. She is also taught to dance and sing for customers, further erasing her sense of self.

When she encounters sexual intercourse for the first time being tricked by Mumtaz, who asks her to drink a cup of lassi that contains sleeping medicine, she confronts a painful experience. She describes the uncommon awake in the morning as “My head throbs. My mouth is parched. I stand on shaky legs, then collapse on the bare floor, the pain between my legs like steering coal” (128). The first sexual partner Habib enjoys her virginity and turns Laxmi into a category where she was never expected to be. When she looks at the mirror, she says, “She looks back at me full of sadness and scorn and says, you have become one of them” (128). The reflection of the mirror and the words inwardly coming out of her psychological dimension were abhorrently loathing her own identity. She was realizing the deterioration of her identity which was exposed as a form of her inner thought. The voices were psychological but the impact was defused both in her body as well as her mentality. In this sense, Laxmi was constantly being attacked by the loss of identity which she could not resist.

As Lakshmi becomes more accustomed to her new life, she begins to lose touch with her former identity. She is constantly reminded of her new name and is forced to perform for customers day after day, causing her to feel like nothing more

than an object for their pleasure. Her past life and family become distant memories as she tries to survive in her new environment. She has to be involved in the material things to relegate her position in the sphere where she was obliged to stay for the sustenance of her life. The customary products become her signifier and her amateur beauty becomes her valuation. More importantly, the beauty of her unripped body is the evaluative indicator that determines her identity. As Naomi Wolf assesses:

Beauty work and professional beauty qualifications in the workplace act together to teach women that. As far as they are concerned, justice does not apply. That unfairness is presented to a woman as changeless, eternal, appropriates, and arising out of herself, as much a part of her as her height, her hair color, her gender, and the shape of her face. (57)

Indeed, for women, beauty is a double edge sword. Beauty is significant for them to make a firm grip in the workplace and at the same time, it is the reason that ditches them into unbelievable trouble. Laxmi, perhaps, was not mature enough to be interpreted from the perspective of beauty; however, as a prostitute, her beauty was her age and it was her beautiful little age that was shaping her expensive material identity.

Laxmi confronts the loss of identity and difficulties in adopting unwanted naming in the materialistic sphere. These circumstances are closely linked with patriarchal domination in a capitalistic society, where money plays the central role in defining the value of human beings. In this scenario, if Laxmi's condition is taken into consideration, the novel shows that women are the extreme group of people who suffer the most. Describing the situation, Simone De Beauvoir writes, "Once a woman is dethroned by the advent of private property, her fate is linked to it for centuries: in large part, her history is intertwined with the history of inheritance" (93). The

domination does not merely exist for a short duration but rather when women are penalized it is the initiation of perpetual subordination. Moreover, Beauvoir further argues:

The fundamental importance of this institution becomes clear if we keep in mind that the owner alienated his existence in property; it was more important to him than life itself; it goes beyond the strict limits of a mortal lifetime, it lives on after the body is gone, an earthly and tangible incarnation of the immortal soul; but this continued survival can occur only if the property remains in the owner's hands: it can remain his after death only if it belongs to individuals who are extensions of himself and recognized, who are his own.

(93)

Beauvoir highlights the importance of property ownership as an institution, demonstrating that the owner invests their existence in the property, valuing it more than life itself. The owner's attachment to their property extends beyond their own lifetime, as it is seen as a tangible representation of their immortal soul. The continued existence of the property after death is only possible if it is inherited by individuals who are considered extensions of the owner and recognized as their own. Laxmi is boycotted from her inheritance and she is induced to work in a brothel which shows that she has been eliminated from the family sphere because her material identity was more significant than her social and familial identity. The capitalistic mindset of her patriarchal father was more concerned with the needs rather than the existence of his daughter. In this sense, Laxmi was undergoing several processes of identity formation, sometimes as a daughter, a wife, a love, and sometimes as a whore; however, she was predominantly holding merely two types of identities: material and

familial, in which her material identity was the dominant icon that was making her suffer, deluded and depressed.

Laxmi is in the net of material identity; nevertheless, she does not want to remain in the situation forever. As she says, “I will become Monica. I will do whatever it takes to get out of here” (233), her words resemble her inner spirit to overthrow the burden of material identity which was dragging her in the mud of suffocation. In fact, she wants to be like Monica who was capable of attracting the males in the brothel and could earn more than other sex workers.

Laxmi certainly had become one of them; nonetheless, she was not eager to accept her material identity and was willing to return to her home means she wants to get her previous identity which was of course not satisfactory but much better than the identity she was holding in the brothel. Her homely identity was vulnerable too but it was because of her poverty or her economic status. She was suffering because the social structure was more concerned with the economy which was devaluing her position thus was sold. In this relevance, Silvia Federici mentions, “The work of social reproduction is fundamental to every aspect of capitalist accumulation, and yet it is a work that is primarily performed by women and that remains invisible, unremunerated, and unvalued” (45). The labor involved in social reproduction is essential to the functioning of capitalist accumulation, but it is predominantly performed by women and is often unseen, unpaid, and unrecognized. Laxmi was happy and would perform her work as long as she was capable of and strengthful to accomplish her job.

Lakshmi is exploited by both her stepfather and the pimp, Mumtaz. Despite working hard as a young prostitute, she earns very little and is considered marginalized and inferior. Even worse, her stepfather takes her earnings as

compensation for selling her into sexual slavery. Lakshmi must also endure daily oppression in the brothel, which only serves to further diminish her worth and silence her voice. She has no means of asserting her rights as a human being or accessing a life similar to that of others. Her oppressor, Mumtaz, has more financial power and authority, which serves to block and silence Lakshmi. In every case, Lakshmi is merely acknowledged from a financial perspective rather than an immature child. She is oppressed because as Silvia Federici claims, "[t]he reproduction of labor power has been at the core of women's oppression and the devaluation of their work, a cornerstone of capitalist accumulation" (24). Within the capitalist system, Mumtaz, a wealthy woman, exploits Lakshmi's existence by running a brothel as a profit-driven, privately owned enterprise. Mumtaz's main objective is to maximize profits for herself, and she displays no concern for Lakshmi's rights, which she regards as her property. As a prostitute, Lakshmi's labor is controlled and exploited by Mumtaz, who fails to acknowledge her identity as a human being deserving of protection, dignity, security, and freedom. In this hierarchical capitalist system, Mumtaz's business is deemed immoral and barbaric because she employs a childlike Lakshmi as her laborer through coercion, thus depriving her of her potential and power due to her family's economic circumstances.

However, Lakshmi's desperate will to leave her material identity and her attempt to be like Monica symbolize that she is against the ways she is obliged to work. Her denial to work at the brothel and connection with the American, who at last rescues her, is a resistive voice against the capitalistic tradition that deflates the stability of women's position and identity. In the words of Silvia Federici, "The struggle against the violence inflicted on women is the struggle to reclaim bodies, to break the silence, to demand the needs, experiences, and our work to be recognized, and to end the

capitalist exploitation of the labor” (8). Considering Federici’s proposition, Laxmi’s vehement fight against Mumtaz is a representative example of women’s resistance through which the redemption of women is possible. Perhaps, Laxmi has lost her home and her identity as well but her perennial strength undoubtedly shows the inner possibility to liberate herself because despite the loss of her identity, Lakshmi never fully gives up hope. She maintains a sense of inner strength and resilience that allows her to endure the hardships she faces. Eventually, she is able to escape the brothel and return home, reclaiming her former identity and sense of self.

Laxmi’s confrontation is not a narrative of a novel but rather a real story of a society where the economy and patriarchy work simultaneously to dominate the social structure. Since the social atmosphere is a confluence of male and female, metaphorically, as Silvia Federici claims, “The body, female and male, is the first battlefield in the struggle against feudalism and the first weapon in the creation of a capitalist order” (73). The prevalence of the dichotomy does not merely disrupts the social order but also succeeds in establishing a new set of value where even the patriarchy becomes the puppet of capitalism. In this sense, it is capitalism that paves the way for the heartbreaking experience for Laxmi who defies the loss of her home and the loss of identity in the playground of the economy.

To sum up, Patricia McCormick’s *Sold* provides a poignant depiction of the struggles faced by women who have been robbed of their homes, identities, and autonomy. This is achieved through the lens of a young girl from a humble village, who is tragically forced into prostitution when her stepfather sells her to a brothel in India. This act of exchanging a daughter for financial gain serves as a stark reminder of the pervasive power of patriarchal forces within capitalist societies.

The suffering of women is often attributed to the actions of other women who are beholden to their husbands. This is evident in *Sold*, where Laxmi's mother views the birth of a son as a necessary duty, rather than acknowledging the vulnerability of women. By adhering to patriarchal norms, Laxmi's mother indirectly contributes to her daughter's loss of home, identity, and freedom. If she had not been submissive to her husband's demands, Laxmi would never have been forced into the dehumanizing world of prostitution. It is possible that Laxmi's mother's compliance is a result of being subjugated by the patriarchal society, which leaves women feeling powerless and unwilling to take a stand for themselves.

Patricia McCormick's *Sold* explores the concept of dual identities, both interior and exterior. The internal identity relates to the concept of being "homely," while the exterior identity refers to material possessions and social status. However, in modern society, simply having a homely interior identity is not enough, as society places greater value on material possessions and external appearance due to the influence of capitalism. This is exemplified in the novel through Laxmi's resistance to the material identity that has been imposed upon her, recognizing the loss of her true interior identity. The novel highlights the unfortunate reality that in societies where patriarchy coincides with capitalism, women are often subjected to the loss of their homes, identities, and freedoms. Therefore the novel is the depiction of the loss of home and identity of women in the backdrops of the economy.

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